



# Raccoon River Greenbelt Newsletter

## SPRING EQUINOX EDITION 2020

### Inside This Issue



**Fund the Trust**  
**Fire Management**  
**Microhabitat Hacks**  
**Value of  
Volunteering**  
**Year of the  
Volunteer**  
**Events Calendar**  
**Morel Mushrooms**  
**Deputy Director  
Hired**  
**Museum Upgrades**  
**Summer Youth  
Program**

### Woodland/Prairie Perspectives

#### Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund

Mike Wallace, Director

*Following is a reprint of an article that was in the February 14, 2020 edition of the Des Moines Register. It was written by Rich Leopold, the Director of the Polk County Conservation Board. I have known Rich for several years, and being in neighboring counties, we deal with many of the same issues, demands, and projects that his department does. His comments are worthy of consideration regarding the proposed Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund. I would encourage all to contact your legislators in support for this trust fund.*

“The date was Aug. 9, 2006. A small group of people from across Iowa gathered at the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge outside of Prairie City to discuss water quality, agriculture, and natural resources.

During the previous Iowa legislature session, John Whitaker, a state representative from Hillsboro with deep ties to Iowa

agriculture, had inserted a short provision into a House appropriations bill. The language established a committee made up of farmers, hunters, a few legislators of each party, and natural resource professionals. Their task was to study and recommend a way to sustainably fund natural resource protection in Iowa.



*continued on page 2*

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email: [conservation@dallascountyiowa.gov](mailto:conservation@dallascountyiowa.gov)



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# Woodland/Prairie Perspectives



*Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation  
Trust Fund continued from page 1*

The path forward seemed long, and fraught with hurdles. How were we to find common ground on agricultural and water quality issues? On a sensible funding method? On how we would “divide the pie” if it ever came to be? On an amount sufficient enough to result in *real* improvement, not just window dressing, while still being efficient and accountable to the citizens of Iowa?

Well, we did it! That first year, Iowa Farm Bureau worked alongside the Iowa Environmental Council, urban folk worked alongside rural folk, hunters worked alongside birdwatchers, Republicans worked alongside Democrats, and we did it! We walked through dozens of funding mechanisms, examined state funding of natural resources from around the United States, spoke with hundreds of Iowans about their “willingness to pay,” shared many laughs and a few frustrations, but we did it!

In 2007 the state Legislature approved language that could appear on a statewide ballot to amend the Iowa Constitution to establish the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund. It was passed again in 2009, as required by Iowa to put a constitutional amendment on the ballot. Both times, it passed with overwhelming bipartisan support. In 2010, the statewide ballot measure was approved by 62% of voting Iowans, a previously unheard of strength of support. The ballot measure received more support than any statewide political race that year!

One last hurdle, now 14 years later, is left to clear. The next three-eighths of 1 cent of sales tax will go to “Fund the Trust” and this needs to come from legislation signed by the governor. In her Condition of the State address this year, Gov. Kim Reynolds revealed the design of the Invest in Iowa Act. She has shown bold leadership, in working with all the same groups that formed the original recommendations, to finally Fund the Trust.

It isn’t done yet, not by a long shot. We must pull together as hunters, farmers, urban professionals, anglers, and outdoor recreation enthusiasts. This is a public health issue, and there is vast support in the public health community. This is an economic development issue; employers need a high quality of life to attract and retain a well-educated and motivated workforce. This is a clean water issue; Iowans deserve cleaner water for drinking, fishing, and recreation. We have been fighting over crumbs that fall off the table for too long, and this fund will mean real money for real solutions that are far overdue.

There are detractors, but not many. When we conceived the effort years ago, we set a “formula” for distribution, which the governor’s proposal would change. That’s OK, to a degree; we knew this would happen to respond to our water and natural resources needs of the changing times. Some existing funding may be compromised. Again, that’s OK, to a degree; the Trust Fund will dwarf past funding efforts within Iowa.

This effort is the single largest thing to improve the water and land in Iowa in the history of the state. The fund is sustainable, accountable, and substantial enough to make *real* difference.

One final push, Iowa, FUND THE TRUST!”



Dr. Jennifer Hoffelmeyer  
Veterinarian

1126 Greene Street • Adel, Iowa 50003

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# Natural Resources



## Burn Baby Burn Curt Cable, Deputy Director/Biologist

It didn't take much to spark my imagination growing up. My family lived on a small acreage outside of town, and the closest neighbor was a half mile away. I would spend hours trying to catch little chubs out of the creek down the road, shooting at house sparrows and starlings with a recurve bow (never successfully), and starting fires with a magnifying glass.

As most young boys do, I had this strange fascination with fire. I would take the magnifying glass from my desk, steal a cast iron skillet from my mom, go to the chicken coup and get an egg from one of the chickens, and grab a pile of straw from the barn. I don't recall ever successfully making an egg, as I was always worried of the repercussions if I got caught trying to start a fire next to a 100 year old barn full of straw.

As I have grown, fire still plays a role in my life, but my objectives have changed. Prescribed fire is one of the best management practices we can use on our natural areas. Fire has been used for years as a management technique. Native people would often set fire to the prairie as a tactic to bring in large herds of bison. The bison were attracted to the fresh nutrient rich grasses which was the byproduct of the fire. Some farmers and ranchers still use this technique on their pasturelands with the objective of producing nutrient rich grasses for their herds.

When planning for a prescribed fire ask yourself the question, "What are you



trying to accomplish?" Is it to reduce fuel loads, improve habitat for ground nesting birds, kill off unwanted woody vegetation, timber stand improvement, increase forbs, aesthetics, or a combination of things?

Once you know your objectives you can look into the timing of the fire. If you are wanting to increase forbs, try burning in

the fall. If you're trying to reduce the amount of undesirable cool-season grasses, burn a little later into the spring or early summer. If you're just trying to reduce fuels and maintain a regular cycle, set fire to it as soon conditions are good. There are multiple schools of thought when it comes to timing of fires and research is still being conducted on these topics. There is not always a right answer, but there may be multiple options available to you.

When creating a plan it is important to set parameters for the burn and to look at the resources available to you. Print out a map and mark your firebreak boundary. Make sure there are not any smoke sensitive areas around your plot, such as busy roads or livestock production areas. Set your weather parameters (wind direction, wind speed, ideal temps and relative humidity range), remember high temperatures, high winds, and low RH are all recipes for disaster. Look for above ground utilities or other hazards, closest alternative water source, adjacent land use/fuels. Once you have those parameters set you can then write out a proposed ignition pattern on the map. Remember a large black line created from a slow back burn (burning against the wind) is the best firebreak you can have. It is also a good idea to contact your neighbors and local authorities to let them know when and where you will be burning as well as when you are done burning.

As long as your objectives have been set, and you stay within your parameters of your plan, fire will continue to be one of your best management tools available. It also allows us to itch those pyromaniac tendencies that we all have.; but in a more controlled environment than a 100 year old barn full of straw.

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## Beyond Birdhouses Microhabitat Hacks for Backyard Wildlife Cindy Blobaum, Naturalist

Are you interested in attracting wildlife to your area? Wild animals need four basic things to survive: space, food, water, and shelter. While most of us can't do much about adding space to our area, perhaps you have addressed the other three by putting out bird feeders, bird baths and bird houses. If you have, you probably already know that these simple strategies often attract other animals as well! Squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons, opossums, deer and other animals love to visit well-stocked feeders. Bird baths provide drinking and bathing opportunities for any thirsty critter that can access it, with ground level bird baths providing water to the greatest number and variety of visitors. We often clean out mouse and wasp nests from the bird houses in our conservation areas. Additionally, maybe you have a garden that does double duty – providing food for hummingbirds and pollinating insects including butterflies, moths and bees - which in turn attracts animals that prey on these (spiders, praying mantids, etc.). Whether you offer these bird-based amenities or not, read on for simple strategies that could make the space around your place more attractive to/for many other kinds of critters.

Start with a survey. What areas are available for adding animal attractions in the space you control? It is best if it is not near or on your house, but consider areas along a fence around your yard, in a garden, or maybe along the unseen side of the garage.

### Untended Corner

The simplest thing you can do is leave sticks, broken bricks/cinder blocks and untrimmed plants in a pile in a quiet corner. This could become a haven for everything from our overwintering mourning cloak and question mark butterflies to toads, shrews, and numerous types of invertebrates.

### Hollow Habitat

Leave dry plants stems standing in your garden areas throughout the winter. Many insects either lay eggs or overwinter as larvae in hollow stems. If the sight of dry stems drives you crazy, do the next best thing and create a native bee bundle (also used by other insects!). Simply bundle some hollow straws or stems of different lengths and diameters together – tied with a piece of twine, stuck in the hole of a brick, or cut and cap a piece of pvc pipe as shown in the picture. Each summer, replace the straws.



### Tree Frog Tubes

Speaking of pvc pipes, longer pieces worked great last summer for our inaugural intentional tree frog tubes! After noticing tree frogs hanging out in the pvc pipe flag holders in the Kuehn Prairie Awakening Arbor, and seeing another conservation area



hanging capped pipes in trees, I did some research and set out 4 sets of two tubes in several conservation areas. The pipes were about 15 inches long, with a cap on one end and two holes drilled near the edge in the other end. I filled each one about half full with water (changing the water weekly), then strung them up near wet areas. It was tremendously gratifying to see how successful they were!



### Bat Backboards

A considerable number of people have asked me about bat houses – do they really work? While we have a number of them hanging on trees in several of our conservation areas, I cannot attest to their

effectiveness. However, several staff members can describe successful bat houses that were larger than most commercial ones you can buy and were attached high on the side of buildings in park areas (not ours). I know for a fact bats LOVE to hang out behind the basketball backboard attached to my garage! While the one on my garage is white and successful, most bat habitat sites encourage dark colored houses, attached to a building, facing south or east, and quite large. So in adding to our pseudo-scientific quest for knowledge and information about what works, I have painted an old backboard to double as an art piece and will place and monitor it this summer. We'll let you know how it works – or make your own and keep us posted!

### Flat Habitat

Lay a board or piece of old carpet on a patch of dirt/area of soil to provide sanctuary spaces for worms, snakes, and sow bugs. I personally prefer using carpet pieces, simply because water can soak through them. If you put the pieces in your garden, they will also help prevent weeds from taking over!

*Microhabitats including Tree Frog Tubes (top), Bat Backboard (center) and Hollow Habitat (bottom)*





# Nature Notes



## The Value of Volunteering Mike Havlik, Naturalist



Last November on a football Saturday, in 39 degree temperatures with rain trying to turn into snow, I watched steam pour out of coveralls, neck gators and wool hats. Jackets or other articles of clothing were removed as clouds of vapor rose like smoke. I wasn't at a football game; I was at Voas Nature Area with eleven people who were clearing underbrush at an oak savanna.

Dallas County Conservation Board has incredible staff that are dedicated to our mission and work very hard. But there simply is not enough hours in a day for us to complete all the projects that we would like to see done. That's where volunteers come into the picture!

My awareness of the value of volunteers came with the clearing of the oak savanna at Voas Nature Area. When I first saw the giant oak trees smothered by dogwood, honeysuckle and multi-flora rose I knew something had to be done and soon. Many lower limbs were dead or dying. But who was going to clear this massive, overwhelming entanglement?

The Summer Youth Volunteer Program is who!

A dozen youth ages 10—14 years old showed up every Tuesday morning for six weeks. Armed with loppers and hand saws they systematically cleared away the choking understory with amazing efficiency. They celebrated as the pile of trees grew larger and larger. Several specialized in cutting and hauling the problematic multi-flora rose. I was blown away at how hard they worked and how much they were able to get done. The oak trees rejoiced, as well.

By cutting the scrub from under the massive oak trees, our operations staff could clear the area in a fraction of the time. The understory responded the next year with dozens of native savanna forbs and grasses. They had laid dormant for decades shaded by the unwanted trees. We extended the volunteer opportunities to adults during the fall and spring season. The work is now in its fifth year.

Volunteering is reciprocal. Participants accomplish something they couldn't do by themselves creating a community focused on a central goal that will benefit others. Often the project is something unique allowing participants to meet new people. Friendships emerge that can flourish into a new social group. It's emotionally engaging giving participants a sense of purpose. We invite you to join the DCCB for the Year of the Volunteer with opportunities to celebrate, captivate, and participate on this landscape that we love and share.

### *Summer Youth Volunteer Program 2020* *June 9th—July 14th, Tuesdays from 8:00 a.m.—noon*

As part of the DCCB "Year of the Volunteer" we will be once again offering the Summer Youth Volunteer Program. This will be our fifth year working on a savanna restoration project at Voas Nature Area. There has been an unbelievable amount of work done by young teens using hand saws and loppers. If you have a child (ages 10 - 14) looking for meaningful work on a conservation project, this is it. I am always blown away by how much they get done in a couple of hours.

There will be an educational component as well and plenty of time to enjoy nature play. Contact the conservation office at 515-465-3577 or e-mail [dallascounty@dallascountyiowa.gov](mailto:dallascounty@dallascountyiowa.gov). Registration for this program is required and will be on a first come, first served basis as space is limited. Please only register if you know your child can attend the majority of dates.



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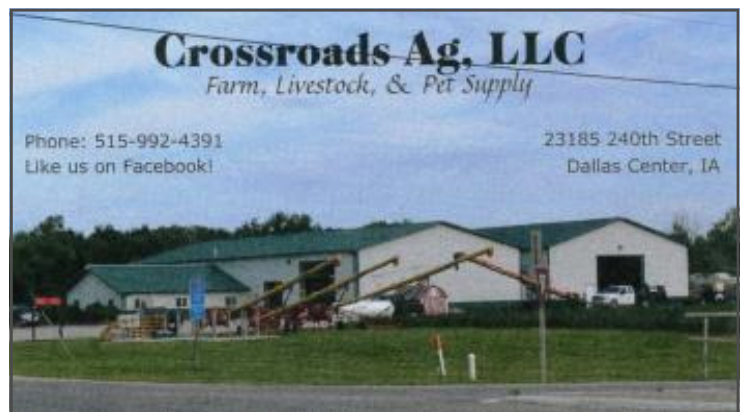


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## Nature Notes



### DCCB 2020 The Year of the Volunteer - *Mni Wiconi*- “Water is Life” Chris Adkins, Naturalist

We naturalists at DCCB have designated 2020 as the Year of the Volunteer. The focus of DCCB’s public environmental educational programs will be to invite you to join DCCB as a force of nature on the land and waters of Dallas County. It is our hope that as we expose you to the varied aspects of DCCB’s conservation efforts, you will come to better understand the what and why of DCCB’s work. Your active participation in DCCB’s conservation work will not only help you see the land differently, but also change how you frame your relationships to our place.

By encouraging you to join us in the work of conservation, you as a volunteer will grow as an individual. You will be active in the protection, preservation, and restoration of the wilds in Dallas County. We believe your invested sweat equity as a volunteer will flip the narrative. It will change from what is DCCB doing, to what are we doing toward conservation. Together we can accomplish great things on the lands and waters of Dallas County in 2020. Aldo Leopold quote expresses our notion, “Once you have learned to read the land, I have no fear of what you will do to it, or with it. And I know many pleasant things it will do to you.” Please consider accepting DCCB’s invitation to through our EE programs and volunteer projects, to come to read the land. Imagine what pleasant things it might do to us as we act as a force of conservation.

Volunteering with DCCB can come in the form of numerous opportunities ranging from ornithology, prairie wallows, seed collection and forb propagation, cultural history and more.

The volunteer programs I am working to provide in 2020 are connected to the Lakota phrase in the title of this article– *Mni Wiconi*. This Lakota phrase, “Water is Life”, reminds us that our waters here in Dallas County are the origins of life. Our lives, and the lives of all wilds in Dallas County, are inexorably tied to our waters.

The 2020 water volunteer programming by DCCB will be two pronged. First, we will be hosting, together with the Izaak Walton League of America, a Save Our Streams citizen scientists volunteer training workshop. Participants in this program will learn the research field skills enabling them to monitor a local body of water to determine it’s ecological health. Armed with the education and equipment provided at this training you can provide baseline data on our local water quality. Your



collected information can then be used to educate and inform the public. Your data will influence local decision makers, working with lawmakers to take actions to protect and preserve our waters. Water quality issues are one of the greatest conservation challenges facing we Iowans in 2020. You can become the front line source of information and solutions to these challenges. Please go to the Calendar of Events page of this newsletter for a link to the registration / information site for the Save Our Streams workshop. Let the waters of Dallas County flow over your feet as you stand in these waters to remember its stories- *Mni Wiconi*.



The second prong of 2020’s water volunteer programming is Project AWARE. By a great stroke of luck, one of the state’s biggest volunteer efforts, an annual massive river cleanup project is coming to our Raccoon Rivers this summer. From July 12th to the 17th, hundreds of volunteers from across the state will be gathering on our waters to spend the week paddling through our county and cleaning our rivers. DCCB is working to create a corps of local volunteers, Dallas County’s *Mni Akicita*, “River Warriors”. This group of DCCB volunteers will be embedded in the paddlers of Project AWARE.





# Nature Notes



DCCB's River Warriors will serve as a welcoming committee to Project AWARE's volunteers. These DCCB volunteers will be identified by a River Warriors shirt and can act as ambassadors on the Raccoons. DCCB volunteers can register to paddle the entire week of Project AWARE, or for just a single day of the project. Please see the Calendar of Events page of this newsletter for a link to the official site of Project AWARE for information and registration details. DCCB asks that if you chose to participate in Project AWARE, that you also register with DCCB, and we will train you as a *Mni Akicita* to welcome, assist and educate the volunteers of Project AWARE as they visit our waters.



A point of clarity here. In traditional terms, the phrase *Akicita*—warrior, does not carry the present day definition as some nature of combatant or soldier. Instead, the phrase gets more at one who defends and protects the community. This traditional translation better fits the intent of DCCB's *Mni Akicita*. Our DCCB volunteer program and Project AWARE provide you with a real opportunity to defend and protect our waters.

As DCCB has worked with the staff of Project AWARE to plan this summer's volunteer river clean up, they have requested that we provide educational programming that will share the story of our place. One such effort on DCCB's part will be to bring Bryan Akipa, a nationally acclaimed Native flute performer to the river valley at our Hanging Rock Conservation Area near Redfield. Bryan will share his music, in the natural amphitheater created by the sandstone exposures at Hanging Rock. This concert will be a can't miss event to put on your summer calendar.

In closing I would like you to ponder two quotes by Aldo Leopold that lend themselves to the events of Project Aware in Dallas County this coming July. First, "Perhaps our grandchildren, having never seen a wild river, will not miss putting a canoe in its singing waters." Protecting the waters to ensure that the least powerful of our community, our children, can have this opportunity, is indeed the work of a warrior. Second, "The good life of any river may depend on the perception of its music, and the preservation of some music to perceive." Join the volunteers of Project AWARE to awaken your the perception of the music. We will be bringing the Raccoon River's music back this July. Volunteer to help us preserve this music.

## ***\$40 to Sponsor a Leopold Bench***

Eagle Scout Josh Nelson constructed numerous Leopold style benches to be placed along the trails of our conservation and nature areas.

Benches are available for a \$40 sponsorship. Aldo Leopold quotes can be inscribe in the benches. Quotes are listed on the DCCB webpage.

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# Spring 2020 Events Calendar



Group leaders please contact our office for programming and scheduling.

## March

### Spring Equinox– Sunset Celebration

Friday, March 20, 6:30 p.m.—8:00 p.m.

Hanging Rock, Redfield

*Preregistration is required for this free program.*

Where did the sun rise this morning? The seemingly straight forward answer to this question is of course– East. Realize, this answer is correct only two days out of the year, and the Spring Equinox is one of this dates. Between the equinox and the solstice date in June, the sun rise will have moved across the eastern horizon some 33 degrees to the north. If you feel the need to slow down the pace of your life and connect the meter of your life not to a piece of machinery– but to the celestial waltz of the Earth and Sun, join us. DCCB has constructed an astronomical clock– built of stones, reconstructing one placed here by First Nation Peoples long before Redfield and Hanging Rock were names on the landscape. Join us for a history lesson of time, a new connection to your place and a celebration of spring's arrival.

### Voas Stewardship Day

Saturday, March 21, 9:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m.

Voas Nature Area, Minburn

*Preregistration is required for this free program.*

Have you ever asked yourself if there was a good way you can help wildlife? Not just temporarily picking up trash but something that had a long lasting impacts. DCCB holds stewardship days throughout the year. One focus for the last few seasons has been clearing oak savanna habitat that has been overgrown at Voas Nature Area, and this stewardship day will expand this work clearing the understory at this site. We will be using handsaws and loppers to clear honeysuckle, dogwood, and small trees. Come help us liberate these smothered “wolf” oaks.

## April



### BYOBook Club

Wednesday, April 8, 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Alton Schoolhouse, Forest Park Museum

*Preregistration is appreciated for this free program.*

*Topic: One Room Schools*

Read any book you like related to **One Room Schools**, then join the group to swap stories and discuss highlights of your selection. A great way to get ideas for books to add to your reading list while

learning more about this historic era in Iowa. Open to ALL ages and all genres, feel free to contact us if you would like book ideas.

### Don't Miss Out

Sign up for the weekly Dallas County Conservation Board eNews by emailing [ken.keffer@dallascountyiowa.gov](mailto:ken.keffer@dallascountyiowa.gov) or calling 515-465-3577

*For more information or to register for any of our programs, contact:*

Dallas County Conservation Board

14581 K Avenue Perry, IA 50220

515-465-3577

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## April

### Year of the Volunteer: Wild Calls for Help

Sunday, April 19, 1:00 p.m.—3:00 p.m.

Forest Park Museum, Perry

*Preregistration is required for this free program.*

Every day, a caring member of the public sees or finds wildlife, from baby bunnies to adult trumpeter swans that appear to need help from humans. Does it really? If it does, what can you do if it's orphaned, injured, displaced, poisoned, covered with parasites, or diseased? How can you keep yourself safe, while making sure the animal is safe? Who can you call? Marlene Ehresman, Director of the Iowa Wildlife Center will share her knowledge and experiences to help you decide what the best course of action is. The few licensed wildlife rehabilitators in Iowa have limited resources including funding, cages, time and veterinary help. Helping out is rarely simple, but trying is almost always the right thing to do.

## May

### Politically Incorrect Politicians

Sunday, May 31, 1:30 p.m.—2:00 p.m.

Forest Park Museum, Perry

Join Forest Park Museum Curator for a short 30 minute presentation of interesting facts and stories about Presidents of the United States. Do you know of any presidents that have killed people? You will after this talk.

## June

### Iowa's Lost History from the Titanic

Sunday, June 7, 1:30 p.m.—2:30 p.m. @ Forest Park Museum

What do an orphan train rider, a kidnapper, a missionary, a wealthy businessman, a wedding guest, a betrayed wife, a farmer and an immigrant recruiter have in common? All had ties to Iowa, and all were passengers aboard the ill-fated Titanic on the fateful night of April 15, 1912, when the famous ocean liner sank. There were a surprising number of passengers with Iowa connections, although many of their haunting, poignant and sometimes shocking tales have nearly faded away. Join noted Iowa author Darcy Maulsby on a remarkable journey as she brings these unforgettable stories from the “ship of dreams” back to life once more. Through masterful storytelling, she weaves together a fascinating look at the maritime disaster from a totally different perspective than most people are accustomed to. During this spellbinding voyage, delve into the human drama intertwined with the Titanic epic, find out who survived and explore the aftershocks that continue to fascinate us more than a century later.





# Spring 2020 Events Calendar



## June

### Year of the Volunteer: Raptor Rescue

Sunday, June 7, 1:00-3:00

Kuehn Conservation Area, Earllham

Preregistration required for this free program. Max 20 people. DCCB receives lots of calls to investigate sick or injured birds. We simply don't have the staff or time to follow-up and each and every one of them. We are inviting Kay Neumann, director of Saving Our Avian Resources, to bring her expertise to train a group of volunteers. Participants will learn to evaluate, secure and transport injured birds and decide where they fit in on the spectrum of care.

### Family Fishing Fun

Sunday, June 7, 4:30—6:30 p.m.

Glissman Conservation Area

Pre-registration is appreciated, but not required.

This program is free and weather dependent.

The gates will be open for all visitors and our fishing gear ready to loan as Dallas County Conservation Board participates in the annual Iowa Free Fishing Weekend. The Glissman pond has a good population of bluegill and smallmouth bass, and is a great place for beginning and experienced anglers.

### Kuehn Kids Concert

Friday, June 12 11:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m.

Kuehn Conservation Area, Earllham

Bring your children and enjoy a free summer outdoor concert. These will be fun and educational nature songs with a sing-a-long component. Learn how "Dirt Makes Your Lunch" and "Bats Eat Bugs". Bring a sack lunch and enjoy the park for the remainder of the afternoon. A great way to kick off your summer.

### Save Our Streams Citizen Scientists Volunteer Water Monitoring Training Workshop

with Izaak Walton League of America

Saturday, June 13, 9 a.m.—4 p.m.

Kuehn Conservation Area, Earllham

Cost- \$10 register at [www.DallasCountySOS.eventbrite.com](http://www.DallasCountySOS.eventbrite.com)

Together Izaak Walton League and DCCB will train local volunteers to better understand the ecological threats to our waterways, identify the pollutants, and their sources, impacting our waters and become certified in the chemical and biological methods used to measure and monitor the health of our waters. Workshop participants will be able to use this information to educate their community, inform local decision makers and help lawmakers better protect our waters. The workshop will consist of a morning filled with classroom presentations followed by the afternoon session practicing monitoring techniques.



## July

### Project AWARE— A Watershed Awareness River Expedition on Middle and South Raccoon Rivers

July 12 to 17

[www.iowaprojectaware.org](http://www.iowaprojectaware.org) for registration and event information

Over the past 17 years, Project AWARE, a volunteer river stewardship program, has taken life. The 5,241 Project AWARE volunteers have together paddled 1,261 river miles and removed 887,097 pounds of trash. Project AWARE has not only had an enormous impact on Iowa's waters, but has also built a community of volunteers actively engaged in enjoying and maintaining Iowa's watersheds. The 2020 Project AWARE route includes the Middle and South Raccoon Rivers. Volunteers can choose to paddle the entire week, or join the fun for a single day. Additionally community events and programming will occur along the route. Wednesday, July 15, the expedition will be camping in Redfield, at DCCB's Hanging Rock Conservation Area. That evening's programming will bring the Native flute music of nationally acclaimed artist, Bryan Akipa, to the river valley. It will be a magical time to sit across river from the sandstone rock outcrops at Hanging Rock, as the music of Bryan's flute carries its messages throughout the river valley. Please consider being a volunteer, joining the Project AWARE expedition, to connect with our river and enrich your sense of place here in Dallas County.

## Nature Pop Up Programs

### Snake Feeding

Mondays, 10:00 a.m.

Forest Park Museum

Free, no registration required. Call ahead to confirm each week. Join us for a chance to see our collection of snakes eat their tasty weekly meals and learn about the other Dallas County critters in our live collection. These underappreciated animals play important roles in our ecosystems and have some "superpowers" to share.

### Butterfly Surveys at Forest Park

To occur on warm (70 + degrees), sunny, calm days.

Walk along with a naturalist to see, identify and count butterflies along a dedicated 1.5 mile survey route that starts and ends at Forest Park. In 2018, the survey was completed 16 times between May 16 and September 4, with 493 butterflies from 19 different species being counted. Call to learn more about voluntary training programs or to be put on the contact list for this free, recurring volunteer opportunity.

### Arboretum Amble

Forest Park, Perry

When talking about spring wildflowers, we often concentrate on the forest floor, and miss the beauty in the trees! This year when the time is right, a naturalist will offer a walking program around the Forest Park Arboretum to identify and explain some of the hidden mysteries within the buds and blooms on some of our spectacular specimen. Pre-register to get notified in advance, or keep your eyes on our Facebook page for dates and times.

mycountyparks.com





# Natural Resources



## Wild & Delicious: Morel Mushrooms

Greg Sieck, Natural Resource Manager

Spring has sprung. I'm looking forward to waking up in the park to the sounds of birds singing a spring time tune, the smell of a campfire, and the sight of local tom turkeys strutting down the park road. This is my favorite time of year to venture out into the great outdoors. Just a few things at the top of my spring time to do list are: morel mushrooms, turkey hunting, shed hunting, walleye fishing, and crappie fishing. I have written a newsletter article on everything but the elusive and delicious morel mushroom. Until now.



faster as they get more direct sunlight throughout the day then the east, west or north facing slopes do. I don't always find them here, but when I'm out searching I key in on these areas. Using this method in the past has led me to filling a few grocery bags full of morel mushrooms.

Here in Dallas County you can search in all of our parks and wildlife areas for the delicious fungi. Just be careful in doing so as spring turkey season is going on at the same time as the fresh morsels are out. Wearing a blaze orange baseball cap or vest can help the hunters spot you and help keep everyone safe.

A few key areas we see the public searching (without giving away our own secret spots) include Big Bend Wildlife Area, Voas Nature Area, Kuehn Conservation Area, and along the Raccoon River Valley Trail.

### Identifying Morels/False Morels

Identifying morels can be tricky as false morels do exist and can be very toxic. The false morel, should you eat it, can cause you to have extreme side effects. Stay away from false morels and learn to identify them. The easiest way to identify a false morel from a true morel mushroom is by cutting it open. A false morel isn't hollow while a real morel is. Other visual keys to identifying morel mushrooms are the honeycomb like caps that slugs and other insects like to call home. Morels always have a hollow stem and hollow core unlike the toxic false morel. Size of morels widely vary. I've found them as big as pop cans and as small as pencil erasers. Colors of morels tend to be yellowish, tan, and even a

grey. False morels tend to have a reddish tint to them and are not hollow.

### Purchasing

You might have seen people at the town square selling morel mushrooms or maybe you've even sold them yourself. But there's one thing to know if you plan to sell or buy morel mushrooms this spring. To legally sell morel mushrooms in Iowa, sellers have to get certified and take a class which covers identifying morels and false morels. Make sure when purchasing mushrooms locally to ask if the seller is certified, and if they're not contact your local conservation officer (Iowa DNR Conservation Officers Dustin Eighmy- 515-238-5006, Craig Lonneman- 515-238-5005). If you're interested in getting certified for selling mushrooms, you can contact your local Iowa State Extension and Outreach office for information on the workshops.

### Why are Morels So Expensive?

Morel mushrooms are super hard to find and impossible to cultivate. This is the main reason their price tag is so high. They only grow in the wild and the delicious treat can be sought after by many in the culinary world as a rarity dish. The window for harvesting and eating them is very small as the price tag can be very high as supply and demand are the driver. There's nothing like a fresh batch of morels paired with fresh caught walleye or crappie to get the taste buds going.

Don't overlook our areas here in Dallas County as there's a niche in every one of our parks that may hold a few delicious fungi! Good luck mushroom hunting/gathering this spring!

### Places to Look

When I get lucky enough to find morels, I tend to find them on timbered south facing slopes next to or near dead or decaying elm trees. Early in the season, south facing slopes warm up the soil

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# Natural Resources



## Fried Morel Mushroom Recipe

Morels hold a high nutritional value and are the highest carriers of Vitamin D among all of the edible mushrooms. Although nutritional, if you eat too many of the tasty treats you can become sick and may never desire these mushrooms again. The internet is your friend when it comes to trying new recipes for morels. My favorite is the Fried Morel Mushrooms. I've modified this recipe from one on The Great Morel webpage.

- 1 pound morel mushrooms
- ½ cup oil for frying
- 2 eggs
- ¾ cup milk (I like to use skim)
- 1 sleeve of Ritz crackers, which you'll need to grind up.

Rinse the mushrooms under the sink, next cut them in half and rinse again and be sure to get all the insects washed out otherwise that's added protein. Then lay them out on paper towels to dry. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. While the oil is heating, beat the milk and eggs in a bowl. Coat the mushrooms in the egg and milk mixture, then toss them in the Ritz cracker crumbs. Make sure you to shake the excess milk and egg off the mushroom before placing them into the cracker crumbs. Carefully place the coated mushrooms in the heated oil. The mushrooms will cook fast. Cook them till they're golden brown and serve warm. Even people who say they don't like mushrooms often fall in love with morels. This is just the case with my wife. She finds the texture of other mushrooms slippery, slimy, or otherwise off-putting. Morels are unique with their meaty texture.

## Familiar Face Hired as Deputy Director/Biologist



Curt Cable has been with the Dallas County Conservation Board for nearly 4 years, but in February, he took on a new role for the organization. Curt was promoted from Natural Resources Manager to Deputy Director/Biologist. In addition to his experience with DCCB, Curt worked for 3 years as Resource Manager/

Naturalist for Poweshiek County. Curt grew up in rural Iowa playing with fire (see page 3). He earned a Bachelor's Degree from Iowa State University in Animal Ecology with a wildlife emphasis. Curt, along with his wife and their three children, live at the Voas Nature Area near Minburn.

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# Museum Musings



## Upgrades at Forest Park Museum for 2020 Pete Malmberg, Curator

The 2020 season promises to be a great year for some upgrades at the visitor center at Forest Park Museum. For the past several years I made plans to make the center much more visitor friendly.

One of the biggest recent changes involved remodeling the northwest corner where the snakes and other small animals are housed. Our snake cages were over 15 years old and showing some serious age. We replaced them with state of the art fiberglass cages from Showcase Cages in California. These cages are high quality, easy to clean and offer a large visitor view screen. We hired electricians to rewire the building for reptile heat rocks and lighting. Visitors never really enjoyed seeing my file cabinets, so staff helped me move them to my store room in the museum. Then that corner was completely gutted and a new back wall was put up. The whole corner will now have a much more open and less cluttered feel. The cages will be at much more accessible level for visitors.



*Black Rat Snake  
adjusting nicely to a new home.*

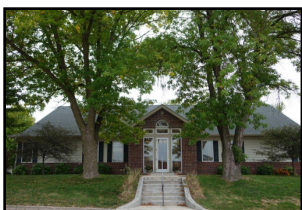


*Bicyclists take a break from the Raccoon River  
Valley Trail to enjoy the exhibits at  
the Forest Park Museum*

The parks and recreation areas interactive signage in the visitor center is also showing some age and needs updating. We are working with audiovisual contractors to come up with a new interactive sign. The park graphic panels surrounding the sign are also scheduled to be updated this year. These changes will help showcase how many things have been accomplished over the last several years.

I am in the process of replacing mat board signage in the Wagner Gallery with permanent plastic panels. The first one is installed and features one of Bill Wagner's quotes over one of the entrances and adds atmosphere to the room. We will be meeting with the audiovisual contractors about the two big final exhibits that will complete the library. One of these will be an interactive sign about Bill Wagner's vast number of historic preservation projects. It will light up at each location on a map of Iowa. There are literally dozens of these sites so the map will be full! The other exhibit will include narration about the life of Bill Wagner and feature an interactive quiz about his life. Like many famous people, Bill was far better known internationally than most local residents realize.

Please come out and see the changes this season. We always love sharing Dallas County's rich heritage with visitors from near and far!



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# Dallas County Conservation Board



## Year of the Volunteer: Summer Youth Volunteer Program 2020

### ***We Want You(th) to Volunteer with DCCB.***

*Voas Nature Area  
Stewardship Volunteers*

*June 9—July 14  
Tuesday mornings 8:00 a.m.—noon*

*Ages 10—14 years old.*

*"I am always blown away by how much they get done in a couple of hours," says Naturalist and program coordinator Mike Havlik.*

As part of the DCCB "Year of the Volunteer" we will be once again offering the Summer Youth Volunteer Program. This will be our fifth year working on a savanna restoration project at Voas Nature Area. There has been an unbelievable amount of work done by youth volunteers using handsaws and loppers. If you have a child looking for meaningful work on a conservation project, this is it. The program runs June 9th to July 14th meeting every Tuesday from 8:00am to 12:00pm. Students who are ages 10-14 are eligible. There will be an educational component as well and plenty of time to enjoy nature play. Registration for this program is required and will be on a first come, first served basis as space is limited. Please only register if you know your child can attend the majority of dates.

Contact the conservation office at 465-3577 or e-mail [conservation@dallascountyiowa.gov](mailto:conservation@dallascountyiowa.gov) to register.

## 2020 RRVVT Permits Now Available



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Phone: (515) 465-3577 Fax: (515) 465-3579  
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